Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1977

The Feminine Novel
Of
The
Seventies

Chronicles of Culture

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Chronicles of Culture

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The Feminine Novel Of The Seventies

Chronicles of Culture are published bi-monthly by the Rockford College Institute, 5050 East State Street, Rockford, Illinois, 61101; Director: John Howard; Editor: Leopold Tyrmand; Staff: Richard A. Vaughan, Nancy Mohrbacher; Printed by: Belrock Printing and Mailing Service; Vignette: "The Mask," or "La Comedie Humaine" — a sculpture by Ernest Christophe, 1876, in the garden of the Tuileries.

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Comment

The feminine novel, a well-established fixture of Western literature, has developed into a peculiar phenomenon during the seventies. Today, this kind of novel has succeeded in being identified with women's literary output — a blatant abuse of reality and an insult to women.

Through centuries, outstanding female writers duly honored the precondition of serious writing: to see the world and life in terms of variety and complexity. Among those writers were masterful practitioners of reflection and analysis, superb storytellers, giants of sentimentality and melodrama. They dissected societies, pondered civilizations, influenced morals and preferences, created tastes and archetypes against which generations measured themselves. In America, Harriet Beecher Stowe — her simplisms notwithstanding — helped structure the process of historical justice; Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Pearl Buck probed the human experience; Gertrude Stein examined the intellectual tissue of art; Edna Ferber and Margaret Mitchell elevated storytelling from entertainment to a dispenser of emotions and penchants. Presently, Eudora Welty, Mary McCarthy, or Joyce Carol Oates seem to continue the tradition of literary womanhood as a highly refined sense of detecting truths and meanings for mankind's sake.

The champions of the feminine novel of the seventies, however, spurn this kind of sensitivity. The novels they produce are bent on taking femininity out of the universal context and substituting it for humanness — formerly the first allegiance of a writer, regardless of gender.

This does not make the feminine novel into a strictly feminist vehicle, though it drowns it in feminist contradictions. The premise of the current feminine novel is that the differences between man and woman — sexual, mental, emotional — are either nonexistent or just a matter of superstition. However, the inherent superiority of femaleness over maleness is a non-negotiable tenet and the hub of feminine creativity. Yet, despite their extolled and professed superiority, women always were and still are wronged and oppressed by men, or by the fact of men's mere existence.

The unprejudiced student of a literature based on such incongruence quickly discovers its two substantive characteristics.

First — it is a body of writing rooted not in life, empiricism or the workings of the intellect, but in the contemporary cultural soil, richly manured with irrationality, faddishness and quasi-scientific versions of reality. The hysterical fermentation of social and psychological pseudo-discoveries and half - truths provides a heady rationale for any departure from good sense and human dignity. Thanks to the complicated interplay between the financial profitability and cultural fecklessness, such literary output thrives on the impressionability of the new social stratum — the middle-class intelligentsia. This is a group which absorbs most of this cultural production, enacts its suggestions, spreading them throughout the nation by means of its own visibility, aggressiveness and affluence; it is a group that rejects middle-class moral and behavioral values, never having acquired any sense of responsibility within the inherited civilization. To women in this group, Joan Didion appears as a prophet, easy and comfortable in her rejection of all constants; Didion's catatonic universe justifies any inertia and absolves all transgressions. Friendly reviewers, who share Didion's perspective, are eager to call her torpid hollowness profundity — and that euphemism pronounced by liberal pundits is enough to make her hit the bestseller list and recruit admirers. Didion is both a master of the current feminine novel and an incomparable designer of shoddy, purposeless lives — but *Time* magazine, whose recommendation sells novels, equated her with Faulkner in a review.

Second — regardless of its occasional sophistication, the feminine novel of the seventies is a lobotomized literature, unable to reflect the world as a whole. Half of the portrayed human reality — the male half — is of comic strip quality, paper or plastic beings. The feminine writers' ineptitude to conceive, outline and flesh out a masculine character astonishes. In the four novels reviewed here, innovative statements about women can be found now and then; yet, none of the men can command simple credibility, let alone sympathy or approval,

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on the part of a reasonable reader. Men are reduced by decree to freakishness or moronicality, to human junk and refuse. This is a vitiated and crippled vision of life; it demonstrates the objective paltriness of the neo-feminine novel as a literary genre. The obsequious liberal critics, however, avoid reminding us these days what a rich lore of femininity has been created by male authors, and with what fairness, compassion and subtlety Flaubert, Tolstoy, Henry James used to write about women.

* * *

Many would say that a few novels, even those with a long period on the national bestseller list, could not make much difference to what happens in America. That is a naive supposition. A social mood, created and reenforced by culture, can wear away the principles of the American Constitution, neutralize the checks-and-balances system which warrants our political freedoms, and disintegrate the free market economy which makes us better nourished and clothed than any other society on this planet. In the never-ending struggle for preservation and proper social care of these tangible values, literature makes a difference. It either bolsters or undermines them — although the effects of either process are only visible from some distance in time.

For the first issue of *Chronicles of Culture* we have chosen the feminine novel which seems to us a striking example of the status of our culture, of the degeneration of our socio-cultural mechanism. The four titles, which epitomize this type of novel, have been excessively praised as eminent literary achievements and have sold hundreds of thousands of copies in hard cover editions. Their overall proclamation seems to be moral lethargy, cheap and facile alienation, sexual aimlessness and hopelessness as human destiny, if not human virtue. For reasons known only to themselves, the literary editors of major American publications have selected critics who are sympathetic to the convictions of the feminine novelists of the seventies to review and criticize these books. The result has been a lavish outburst of enthusiastic applause throughout America. A slick and spurious conceptualization of reality has turned, with the concerted help of the Liberal Cultural establishment, into the reigning socio-cultural haze which has begun to contaminate the minds, souls and ambitions of a large number of women. We, at the Rockford College Institute, take exception to this glut of jubilation: we see these novels as representatives of a specious philosophy and morality, as mendacious presentations of the issues, and as rather flawed pieces of writing.

Slaves of high fashion, the editors of *The New York Times, Esquire, Book World, Playboy* never stop performing the rituals of cant; if marxism, feminism, nihilism or promiscuity become fashionable, the editors invite marxists, feminists, nihilists and lechers to review marxist, feminist, nihilist and lewd books. It goes without saying that under such conditions honest literary criticism has little chance, and those who wield the power of liberal opinion have little use for it. How, then, can rationality and fairness defend themselves and survive in contemporary American literature? No easy answers come to mind. As a modest device to debunk falsehood and identify trash, the *Chronicles of Culture*, perhaps, can be of some help.

—Leopold Tyrmand

Mr. Tyrmand, a novelist and literary critic, believes that men write better about women than vice versa.

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The Liberation of a Free Woman —Francine du Plessix Gray: *Lovers and Tyrants*

Near the end of this novel, the heroine, an up-and-coming writer named Stephanie, announces to her lover and tyrant of the moment, "We must confront vague ideas with clear images." This is a tall order; she has managed here to hit upon one of the essential tasks of great literature, one which the poets, dramatists, and novelists have always sought to accomplish. In *Crime and Punishment,* Dostoevsky confronts the vague ideas of revolutionary nihilism, current among Russian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, with the clear image of young Raskolnikov, who destroys himself when he takes those ideas to heart and lives by them. In *Madame Bovary,* Flaubert confronts the vague romanticism and the doctrines of progress of his time with the clear images of Madame Bovary's tragic career and the petty cruelty of provincial Normandy. It would be a pleasure to report that *Lovers and Tyrants* achieves something comparable, but it does not; it is confused at its heart, in its images, and under the circumstances, the critic's task becomes one of confronting vague images with clear thoughts.

Stephanie's story, the story of *Lovers and Tyrants,* purports to be an account of "every woman's life": "a series of exorcisms from the spells of different oppressors; nurses, lovers, husbands, gurus, parents, children, myths of the good life, the most tyrannical despots can be the ones who love us the most." Stephanie wants to be a liberated woman, and the book follows her from one exorcism to another as she gradually but relentlessly cuts herself off from all normal human relationships. Her career provides yet another literary image of the modern quest for radical freedom, for an absolute autonomy of the self beyond all external authority. Predictably, she passes through the stages of that quest that have become stereotyped in recent years: alcohol, drugs, kinky sex, meditation, and running away.

All of this has become boringly conventional by now, but Gray's image of Stephanie also has something more interesting to offer. Stephanie is not simply a leaden-hearted, self-absorbed lover of her "own thing." On the contrary, she can understand and regret the loss that her assertion of freedom entails. She feels driven to abandon her family and friends, but she does not do so with the self-righteous vengefulness that characterizes so much modern liberation. In the last section of the book, as she wanders aimlessly through the southwestern United States with Elijah, a gay photographer, sometimes her lover, she remembers with poignancy her husband and children, and even wishes that it were possible for her to return to them. Stephanie wants to be liberated, but she also longs for human bonds. She is torn between two irreconcilable ends, and although there is nothing original in that, it is at least plausible.

True to the age from which it springs and which it images, Stephanie's story is concerned especially with her sexuality. Nothing challenges her search for autonomy more persistently than her sense that male and female need each other for sexual fulfillment. She tries masturbation but finds it "pathetic compared to the real thing." Lesbianism attracts her only intermittently, and celibacy offers no solution. She wants men,and they threaten her sovereignty; she equates lovers with tyrants, and still desires lovers.

Here is a dilemma worthy of a comic or tragic genius, worthy of a writer who could create clear images to chronicle the confusions of our age. At times, Gray seems on the verge of grasping and expressing the hollowness of the quest for autonomous freedom, the fact that it cannot yield the fulfillment that it promises because it is founded on a false view of life. Neither humanity nor happiness is to be found in the process of constantly cutting one's self off. Unfortunately, however, she seems not to have gazed clearly enough at her own material, and her images fail her in the end.

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One night in the moonlit desert of Arizona, Stephanie looks into emptiness: "Nothing. The key word is 'nothing' . . . Nothing . . . Disintegration of matter. Anarchy. Peace." *Lovers and Tyrants* should have ended here. The inner logic of Stephanie's career, her liberation, leads to disintegration. This is too grimly honest for Gray, however; better to blink the truth than defect from the ranks of "liberation." She goes on to conclude with a very different image, one that is as artistically and intellectually implausible as it is grotesque. Stephanie sits alone, isolated from Elijah, in a "gigantic all-night boite called Circus Circus." Looking up at the ceiling, she sees, high above her on a tightrope, an androgynous creature with "long light-brown hair to below its shoulders, slender hairy legs, pointed, girlish buttocks." This incredible figure performs with "infinite grace" and looks down at Stephanie with "a sweet, sad smile." "She blows him a kiss. Metamorphosis. Transfiguration. No more Nihil. My son the aerial artist. The angel of the imagination . . . I am much better off now . . . I am total, complete .. . In the next months I shall caress only images, bathe them, feed them, give them life . . . I've exorcised myself of one hell of a bunch of oppressors . . . Here at last, is a beginning."

No doubt the image of the tightrope walker could have been more carefully bathed before being sent out into the world. But even a good bath could not cleanse the woolliness of this rhapsody. Stephanie's anguish, which was credible and worthy of examination, has been transformed into a fashionable pose, a trite appeal for approval by the gurus of liberal culture who dominate our intellectual life. At the end, *Lovers and Tyrants* tries to assure us that Stephanie has found a way to have it all, to have men and yet be autonomous, to have a son and remain alone, to be complete in herself without being more or less than human. She will do this by living in a world of images which are created to correspond to her wishes, in other words — by escape. Images that indulge and caress our desire to escape, however, are not the stuff of great art; great art is faithful to life. Gray does not understand that the oppressor Stephanie most needs to exorcise is not a lover, a husband, a child, or a parent, but the false concept of liberation that has cut her off from all that is normal in life, and has made it impossible for her to find satisfaction outside the fantasy world of "Circus Circus."

Read the writers who have created tough and honest images. Read Flaubert. Read Dostoevsky.

—Dain A. Trafton

Dr. Trafton chairs the English Department at Rockford College and views the current literary matters with a Yankee precision.

The Liberal View

"*Lovers and Tyrants* shows a writing power superbly able to recreate familial and private experience, especially religious experience, over four decades." — *America.*

"Sensual, glowing, altogether extraordinary. The stages of her heroine's journey are rendered with a richness unequaled in contemporary fiction." —*Cosmopolitan.*

"Marvelous. Many might be quite content to write and publish a novel as fascinating as this one." — *Washington Post Book World.*

"*Lovers and Tyrants* is the story of a brilliant and sensitive woman." — *The Progressive.*

"There is an age that has learned any grievance must be accepted as both genuine and significant if the public weeping and wailing are long and loud enough. It would therefore be wise to take seriously Mrs. Gray's passionate meditation on the tyranny of love . . ." — *Time.*

". . . Mrs. Gray almost always writes with fierce intelligence and perspicacity." — *The New York Times.*

"Erotic, poignant, tender and wonderfully exuberant, it is a masterly work that establishes its author as one of the most brilliant writers of fiction in our time." — *Publishers Weekly.*

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The Piety of an Empty Heart —Joan Didion: *A Book of Common Prayer*

Few executives at Gulf & Western — whose subsidiary published the book — are apt to be caught by Joan Didion's novel, but their daughters and wives are likely to be entranced. For that reason, if for no other, it might pay businessmen to dip into this tale of life gone awry amid the wealthy leftwing. Didion is a star among liberated women writers, and her work epitomizes attitudes that regularly well from the pages of women's magazines, the women's sections in newspapers, and the literature of the ERA movement. Such perfect samples are hard to find, and executives at Gulf & Western would be particularly rewarded by reading Ms. Didion's book, for they are in the position of restaurant operators unaware that some of the cooks are poisoning the soup.

The plot is simple, once the reader unravels flashbacks and the folds of style. Mrs. Douglas, 40, a thin and wealthy Californian, married to an international lawyer whose clients are mostly Third World puppets, learns that her daughter has joined a revolutionary group that detonated a bomb in San Francisco; she then hijacked a PSA plane, set it afire in Utah, vanished — and is being sought by the authorities. The unknown fate of her "child" — as the daughters is always described — unhinges Mrs. Douglas who meets her misfortune in the *Zeitgeist* vein. She leaves her husband to join her ex-husband in a drunken and extended ramble through the southern states of the East, punctuated by innumerable copulations, nasty scenes, three-person sex and glimpses of various homes, motel rooms and country clubs. Mrs. Douglas is pregnant during this tour, but that does not distract her too much. Her amniotic fluid breaks on a plane ride to New Orleans, but she delivers her baby in a clinic. Learning her ex-husband has terminal cancer, she flees the clinic with her newborn infant, though she knows it was born encephalitic, with "no viable" liver function, and cannot survive. Later it dies — in her arms, of course — in the parking lot of a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Mexico, a refined touch of literary symbolism.

Mrs. Douglas then wafts into a mythical Central American republic called Boca Grande, where she is watched and her saga narrated in disjointed snippets out of sequence by a locally important landowner called Grace Strasser-Mendana, an American-born anthropologist and amateur biochemist. Boca Grande—or Big Mouth—is at first described as consisting mainly of corrugated huts beside a "lifeless" sea, but later develops neighborhoods where nurses push baby carriages. Still later it becomes clear that Big Mouth has a landscape whose features conveniently alter at the will of the author, like the scenery in the old Krazy Kat comic strip.

Sra. Strasser-Mendana (someone should tell the author that Latins do not hyphenate last names; that is an English custom), resident seer in the novel, is also dying of cancer. Her son Gerardo is depicted as a Latin lecher and politico; his wife as a fool. Her nephew, Antonio, is termed a "sociopath" and in turn he repeatedly calls Mrs. Douglas obscene names that in some books would be considered coarse, but amidst Ms. Didion's mock-litanies about pestilences, diseases, parasites, Parisian name dresses, limousines, emeralds, caviar with an Israeli general at Lod Airport and other *haut monde* references of the sort familiar to readers of *Vogue*, they merge into a style which successfully camouflages a moral and psychological vapidity of those who talk as well as the one who created the talking. In the end, Mrs. Douglas is shot to death during a Big Mouth revolution, just after learning her missing daughter's whereabouts—and refusing to leave.

Dramatic descriptions of settings and creations of mood are Ms. Didion's *forte*, but catharsis, that little philosophical gismo used for ages by writers who care about credibility when they unleash the forces of life and death, seems to be a word to which she has not yet been introduced.

As is usual in modern women's novels the men are uniformly weak and outclassed by

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the women, but Ms. Didion is unusual in being remarkably hard on everyone. No group — whether Jewish, Islamic, Latin or American—is portrayed in other than withering sarcasms. In the aggregate this astonishes, for the author is considered a successful woman which should have entitled her to a bit of magnanimity. Apparently, the latter does not sell these days at Brentano's which somehow coincides with the circumstance that novels like this one do sell but remain alive only during their sojourn on the bestseller list.

Ms. Didion's novel conveys a sense of despair and a conviction that life is meaningless. It merits attention not for such unhappy views, but because the authoress is considered a leading light among a fashionable coterie. Her work is a good example of what major New York publishers consider a serious offering to this nation. Beyond that, there is an essential observation that must be made regarding the judgment of both the author and the publisher. Whichever its metaphoric innuendo, to title this compendium of dreary and messy existences *A Book of Common Prayer* is to insult not only the members of the Episcopal Church. That the editors of Simon and Schuster could so openly reveal such an anti-Christian prejudice is another and very important subject the executives at Gulf & Western would do well to talk over at their family tables with their children who, after reading enthusiastic reviews in the liberal press, might consider Ms. Didion a spiritual and behavioral beacon — instead of a firefly — of our times.

—Otto J. Scott

Mr. Scott, a native New Yorker, published biographies of James I and Robespierre, and now writes from San Diego.

The Liberal Opinion

"Like her narrator, she (Didion) has been an articulate witness to the most stubborn and intractable truths of our time, a memorable voice, partly eulogistic, partly despairing; always in control." — *The New York Times Book Review.*

"... Joan Didion has produced a remarkable modern variation on Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady.*" — *Time.*

"This is a remarkably good novel." — *Newsweek.*

"No one, I suppose, would be likely to accuse Didion of naivete. Her work is pungent with knowingness ... Under her pared phrases one senses the quick of desire for something more noble, more tender, and more enduring than crass contemporary realism ..." — *Saturday Review.*

"There is a nobility here, across the board. It is a sense of having hung around for the worst, and having taken the best when it unhid itself ... A sense that the prominence of the unsavory (and the diminished and compressed and symbolic) exceeds its light, that to know anything whole and tell it whole, is to survive it." — *New Times.*

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Fish Story—

Lois Gould: *A Sea-Change*

Lois Gould's latest novel, *A Sea-Change*, is pretentious, silly, and mostly plain dull. The story concerns two women, two young girls, and two men. Much of the action takes place during a hurricane, and in that crisis one of the women emerges as a resourceful leader, responsible for saving the lives of other characters. The novel in fact might have been a survival story, or an analysis of a personality under stress, but Miss Gould unfortunately has a cause to serve, and her dedication to that cause interferes with her art. She establishes symbolic connections with all the subtlety of a sledge hammer, but at the end even she gets confused about whether to deliver one more condemnation of the male-dominated world which has distorted her heroine, or sing praises of female ingenuity and toughness. Her uncertainty, however, does not quite rise to the level of that ambivalence which makes novels art.

There is, at least, no ambiguity about the basis for Miss Gould's message. One of the epigraphs of the novel is borrowed from D.R. Robertson's *Social Control of Sex Reversal in Coral-Reef Fish*, and the passage deserves to be quoted:

> Males of *labroides dimidiatus* control the process of sex reversal in social groups. Each group consists of a male with a harem of females, among which larger individuals dominate smaller ones. The male in each harem suppresses the tendency of the females to change sex, by actively dominating them. Death of the male releases this suppression and the dominant female of the harem changes sex immediately.

Lest any one miss the relevance of ichthyology to events in the novel, the authoress generously adds a note explaining that *labroides dimidiatus* is related to certain cold water fish "native to the Atlantic Ocean, off New York." Thus the reader can hardly be surprised when a short time later he finds himself off New York at a place called Andrea Island and in the company of a set of characters suspiciously resembling the social group of the fish. For good measure, in case anyone has suffered a lapse of memory between the epigraph and the concluding chapters, Miss Gould's heroine-become-hero removes at last with her/his harem to a nearby spot called Reef Island.

The same delicacy of touch governs the presentation of the human social group. Roy Waterman (!) is the king who dominates the harem. He is a moderately successful producer of animated television shows and is "no more of a sexual bully than most men of his time and place." During the hurricane Roy's position is temporarily filled by a wandering Coast Guardsman, Surfman Leo Bailey. (Miss Gould apparently finds name games irresistible.) The "harem" itself comprises the four female characters. Two of them are Roy's daughters, although the girls are only half-sisters, for old Roy has a number of ex-wives and a prodigious quantity of what he calls "ex-children" scattered abroad. The older girl, Diane, is fond of translating Latin poetry and masturbating; the younger, Robin, plays with a collection of dolls representing famous women in history and is the vehicle for little lectures on such topics as the unfairness of (male) historians toward Hatshepsut. The third member of the group is Roy's latest mistress, who happens also to be an old college chum of the dominant female of the harem, Roy's present wife. Poor Jessie Waterman, an erstwhile model and, at least when the novel opens, an "old" rather than a "new" woman, is the fish who undergoes the pronounced change, eventually coming to call herself — Miss Gould's way with names — B.G. Kilroy.

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Jessie is the center of interest in this fish story. She is the victim: victim of countless male fashion photographers whose cameras were the instruments of their domination, victim of Roy and their "old" marriage, and victim, too, in the opening sequence of the novel of a Negro robber who tied her up with a pair of pantyhose and sexually assaulted her with a gun. This robber-rapist, whom Jessie calls "B.G." (Black Gunman) and whose initials she subsequently appropriates, is in a curious way responsible for Jessie's transformation. Following that assault, Jessie first realizes that she hates Roy, and the experience, understandably, looms large in her mind. Instead of real analysis of the character, however, Miss Gould allows Jessie to indulge in reflections about the techniques of male dominance, the phallic images which surround her: guns, "buildings, cars, bombs, crucifixes. All weapons that control or hurt" and "Even the words . . . to make you remember. Thrust, drive, penetrate, shoot."

The climactic moment for Jessie occurs in the wake of hurricane Minerva, the storm which devastates Andrea Island. Miss Gould has been at some pains to establish a sympathetic bond between Jessie and the storm. Poor Minerva, like poor Jessie, is a victim of men who drive their machines into her core and shoot things into her in an effort to control her. The men fail in their attempts to control the hurricane; Minerva, like Jessie, eludes at the last minute the watchfulness of men, and both display unexpected violence. Jessie, in fact, reenacts B.G.'s rape, this time using Roy's pistol on Kate, the old school-chum-mistress, with whom in Roy's absence she had earlier enjoyed a lesbian interlude.

Once the storm has passed, little remains to be told. B.G. Kilroy and the two girls make their escape to Reef Island; Roy, in Copenhagen on business during the storm, returns to search fruitlessly for his wife and children; Kate goes back briefly to New York but finally journeys to Reef Island to take what appears to be her proper place in B.G. Kilroy's harem.

The book is devoted to seemingly endless discussions of male and female "weapons." The rather slavish adherence to the research on *labroides dimidiatus* as a basis for a literary argument leads Miss Gould to produce a text which is neither very satisfying about people nor very informative about fish. The novel, however, is illuminating as a specimen of that modish and trendy pretense to, even craving for, an encompassing, all-explaining metaphor, so frantically sought by most of the women writers of our time. It is one more pursuit of an allegory which ultimately will tell both how victimized and how powerful women are. They insist on having it both ways.

—John Glass, Jr.

Mr. Glass, a student of medieval morals and manners, teaches English literature at Rockford College.

The Liberal Enthusiasm

"Startling original, beautifully written — and important. Plunge into the eye of Lois Gould's storm . . . you will feel her full, furious creative force." — *Chicago Tribune Book World.*

"Not meant for the squeamish. Crisply written and hard-edged, it demonstrates Lois Gould's special skill in selecting the solitary detail that speaks volumes." — *The New York Times Book Review.*

"Gould's treatment of character is ironic and insightful, and the book is sharply and dramatically written." — *Booklist.*

"An extremely accomplished writer, Gould . . . portrays problems of male-female conflicts whose public discussion is a more recent trend." — *America.*"

"No reader will ever forget the novel's denouement." — *Book-of-the-Month Club News.*

"One is knocked down, stunned, goes compulsively on, is impressed by the artistry. A disquieting reading about sexual power at its most violent and obsessive." — *Publishers Weekly.*

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An Epitome of Junk— Gael Greene: *Blue Skies, No Candy*

When confronted with a book like this, the impulse is to dismiss it as meretricious trash, written to make a killing in the literary marketplace, a hit and run novel. In fact, it is doubtful whether Gael Greene would seriously contest this accusation. At a party attended by New York's "Beautiful People," a woman fashion designer whose dresses average $1000 per approached Greene and approvingly commented that the success of the novel would soon enable its author to afford her clothing. So much for literary recognition.

The trend of "sexploitation" in fiction is, of course, no recent phenomenon. Several years ago a group of anonymous Madison Avenue admen banded together and decided to conjunctively compose a novel of highest pornographic content, whose sole aim would be to make money. This hoax, entitled *Naked Came The Stranger,* was passed off as the pioneer work of a suburban housewife, along with lines of Grace Metalious's legendary *Peyton Place.* The collective did not make their millions, which goes to prove that pure hack work is sometimes the most difficult writing to do successfully. A certain belief in one's self, a conviction that one's efforts possess value, is often the missing ingredient that separates a commercial hit from a miss. The late Jacqueline Susann was convinced of her place as the Zola of the twentieth century. As much as the sophomoric scribblings of an Erica Jong might embarrass a reader, one is struck by Jong's total narcissistic faith in herself; she projects a dim-witted but sturdy belief that the uniqueness of her talents and the fascination with her persona engulf anyone who turns her first page.

As a deliberate purveyor of junk, Gael Greene seems to be an epitome. A gourmet critic for *New York Magazine* and a formidable expert on the world's most celebrated restaurants, she seems to have written the book to be able to indulge herself at The Palace, the most expensive eatery in New York, where dinner *a deux* can easily total $250. As Greene wrote recently in an ecstatic review of The Palace: "Some people buy emeralds . . . I am good to my mouth." Not sex, as her novel might imply, but *gourmandise* is the author's vocation. This is not the basest of pursuits, but to create pseudo literature for this purpose debases it to the level of a drug addict's felonies to support his costly addiction.

Blue Skies, No Candy is a sci-fi sex book; there are no recognizable human characters, the protagonists and their organs are made out of an indestructible vinyl. It is set in a Madison Avenue created world of frantic consumerism where the credits are the most salient points of the narrative: luggage by Gucci; accommodations by the Plaza Athenee; wardrobe by Saint Laurent; catering by Alain Chapel. In this hypothetical environment the men are all impossibly handsome, wealthy and virile, while Kate Alexander, the fortyish, face-lifted, soon-to-be-on-the-cover-of-*Time,* screen-writing heroine can deny herself nothing from Gotham's sexual smorgasboard. And each new helping is more delicious than the previous one. Both protagonist and narrative are as far removed from reality as the adventures of James Bond: not "kiss kiss bang bang" but "bang bang bye bye."

And in spite of — and because of — the sheer density per page of fornication, it is devoid of even the smallest hint of eroticism. No one cares about Kate Alexander, twentieth century female stud. We always cared about literary couples who were enmeshed in strange and illicit, even aberrant and deviant relationships: Cheri and Lea, Lolita and Humbert, Temple Drake and Popeye, Sonya and Raskolnikov, Rachel-Quand-Du-Seigneur and Robert Saint-Loup. Their off-beat encounters may have been far removed from our experiences, but we became engrossed in their fictional lives nonetheless. Kate Alexander may leave her husband or stay with him, sleep with men and/or women, write a prize winning script, but no one

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cares. Her obligation to her genitals is so overwhelmingly serious an undertaking that it becomes sadly grotesque, like the romps of a cheap, tired clown. And because Kate, the non-person, generates no feelings, her erotic entanglements create no excitement: no empathy, no curiosity, no lust.

We have already relegated the myth of Don Juan to the psychiatrist's couch; he is considered nowadays a symbol of loneliness and pathos, a figure of scorn. Does their "liberation" mean that women have struggled hard and finally achieved their much desired parity with men in this role as well? The protozoan-like heroine gropes her way from body to body, her triumphant moment of sexual egalitarianism occuring when one of her co-workers — one hesitates to call him her partner, even less lover— complains: "You're only interested in bed."

Why should women, portrayed by novels this shoddy and this salable, yearn to ultimately emulate that which they so vocally profess to reject? The numerous female writers who might be considered speakers for the "new woman," or at least as apostles of the newly sexually liberated woman, are ideologically and morally confused. What comes to mind is the old cliche: "It's repulsive, it's immoral, and I'm not getting any." Critical of so-called traditional male sexual behavior, they yearn to usurp it for themselves, yet in addition demand that we take them seriously both as representatives of the contemporary woman and as writers as well. But both of these demands sound like a poor joke.

—Mary Ellen Fox

Dr. Fox specialized at Yale in XIX century woman's literary fate, and didn't find it too hideous.

The Liberal Delight

"Effective, witty, immensely readable . . . Kate's aphrodisiac odyssey is a classic of its kind." *—Cosmopolitan.*

"It's new and fun to read an erotic book written by a woman, about a woman who takes extraordinary joy in sex instead of suffering it as misery." — Betty Friedan (William Morrow's publishing ad).

"Talk was that Gael Greene's first novel would be the sexiest by a woman yet, and talk was *right.*" — *Saturday Review.*

"A sizzling sexual odyssey. Kate is a strong, twentieth-century heroine . . ." — *Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News.*

"If this is what happens when you let them out of the kitchen, I'm all for it." — Jimmy Breslin (William Morrow's publishing ad).

" . . . erotic, cinematic, and bluntly honest . . . there is an archetypal, elemental woman seething through all acting-out . . . viscerally enjoyable and credible." *—Library Journal.*

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About the
Chronicles of Culture

The Rockford College Institute presents a new publication entitled *Chronicles of Culture*. It will feature reviews of books credited with an impact on the current cultural scene, and provide viewpoints that are usually eliminated from the literary marketplace, or silenced by the Liberal Establishment that runs the media.

We, at the Rockford College Institute, believe that culture is, more than ever, the breeding ground of formative factors: it engenders attitudes, lifestyles, exemplars, it abounds with archetypes and modes of conduct that create a social atmosphere in which human destinies are formed. We also believe that books, especially novels, still exert an influence on the society and on the individual. We know, too, that the success of a book in America depends on the critical interpretation and acclaim, and we know that all the manipulative power today is in the hands of liberal critics, reviewers and promoters. We know, finally, that the selling of a book has little to do with its objective worth and even less with its social and moral utility. The *Chronicles of Culture* intends, therefore, to supply a value-oriented criticism which is banned from the pages of *The New York Times*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *The New York Review of Books* by the liberal bigotry, orthodoxy and fashion.

The *Chronicles of Culture* brings the national bestseller list to the attention and scrutiny of the middle-class readers. We assume that a large part of that audience has a good education and developed minds. Our effort is designed to kindle their interest in culture, for, regardless of what they wish to know or ignore, they live with cultural events and their consequences. These events reappear at their dinner tables either directly in conversations, or through opinions, poses, and manners their own family and friends adopt under the pressures of the communication industry. The middle-class reader, who happens to be a businessman, finds literary reviews in *The Wall Street Journal*, as that paper keeps track of cultural facts: however, it does it from an eclectic and morally uncommitted point of view, looking for neutral qualifications. We want to show the thoughtful businessman another perspective — namely how a book, its meaning and success, affects his life, his economic activity and his sense of social order which is indispensable to carry out these activities.

The lopsided view of the arts, along with the current "anything goes" posture toward subject matter, has produced a body of works whose offensiveness is only surpassed by its shallowness. The modern liberal reviewer tacitly obliterates a whole realm of natural and human norms by their omission which renders his critiques not only inadequate, but potentially harmful to the reader. We feel that there is a need for answers to all who judge cultural offerings by blinking the effects of messages that are cut off from any moral code.

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About the Rockford College Institute

The Rockford College Institute is founded on the premise that both America and Western civilization are in urgent need of the revival of certain ideas which have become decomposed, bemuddled and trampled by the culture of our time. It attempts to restore reason, order and tradition to their natural role in human affairs. It believes that a new meaningfulness can be found in permanent values by raising the level of cultural sophistication, which should not be confused with intellectual sophistry.

The Rockford College Institute seeks to assist Americans in regaining a commitment to those attitudes and principles required of an effective free society, and essential to the private enterprise system, about which there are so many confusions that need clarification.

Thus, we strive to make it plain and credible that freedom without responsibilities is freedom's undoing; that pragmatism, the American message to mankind, must be calmly employed but passionately defended; that compassion devoid of rationality turns into neurosis; that imagination divorced from prudence impoverishes instead of enriching the sense of existence; that conscience has to be judicious to serve civic and personal purposes.

America's incomparable success as both a civilization and a society came from a healthy balance between authority and freedom. Nothing could pervert this functional arrangement until the critics of America turned into haters and persecutors during the sixties and succeeded in branding authority as tyranny. The malaise, even oppression, brought upon us all by their disjointed thinking, injured the consciousness of an entire generation. Confounding authority with tyranny proved an easy way to demolish the permanent value of freedom.

We, at the Rockford College Institute, believe that there is an unmistakable distinction between authority and tyranny; that one is as essential to freedom as the other is incompatible with it.

* * *

The Rockford College Institute offers a variety of services to the American businessman, and any other group, or individual, who may be interested in our work.

We publish pamphlets, essays, and treatises on topics related to our concerns. Seminars and conferences will be held on the Rockford College campus and provide insights by the country's best qualified scholars and specialists.

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